

## Purim Message 5777

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Purim:

Ta'anit Esther

R. Yaakov Bieler

5777

**The Fast of Esther this year will be observed on Thursday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017.**

This year, because Purim occurs on Motzoai Shabbat (Saturday night), the fast of Esther, which usually immediately precedes the festival, is pushed back to the previous Thursday:

Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 686:2

It is proper to fast on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar. And if Purim takes place on Sunday (beginning Saturday evening), the fact takes place earlier on Thursday.

Mishna Berura #3 s.v. LeHitanot BeYom Heh

But on Friday (*if one cannot fast on Shabbat, other than if Yom HaKippurim occurs on Shabbat, why not push the fast up by one day rather than two days?*), one does not institute communal fasts, because of the honor of Shabbat, because people customarily recite Selichot and supplications (on a fast day), and on Erev Shabbat it is impossible to do so, because this would interfere with the efforts to prepare for the honor of Shabbat...

**The basis for Ta'anit Esther is not in Megillat Esther.**

Albeit Esther requests that the Jewish people fast and pray on her behalf in order that her calling on Achashveirosh despite not having been summoned, will turn out well for her, and in turn, the Jews:

Esther 4:15-7

**15** And Esther said to deliver a message to Mordechai. **16** Go, gather all of the Jews that are in Shushan and fast on my behalf, and do not eat and do not drink three days, night and day. Also, I and my servants will fast in this manner. And then I will come to the king not in accordance with the law, and if I will be lost, I will be lost. **17** And Mordechai went away (from the palace) and he did in accordance with all that Esther had commanded him.

it would appear for several reasons that Ta'anit Esther has nothing to do with the recorded fast in the Megilla:

The Fast of the Megilla	Ta'anit Esther
Three days.	One day.
Night and day.	Only during the day.
Praying on behalf of Esther	<i>Unclear what the reason for the fast might be.</i>

14 <sup>th</sup> , 15 <sup>th</sup> , 16 <sup>th</sup> Nissan—the first and second days of Pesach (!) (RaShI on Megilla 15a s.v. Yom Tov Rishon Shel Pesach)	13 <sup>th</sup> of Adar II (unless Purim occurs on Sunday)
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Avudraham (Seder Tefilot HaTa'aniyot) quotes Even HaYarchi:

It (Ta'anit Esther) is not for the purpose of commemorating Esther's fast because we do not fast night and day, and furthermore it took place during Pesach (*communal fasting is precluded from Yom Tov*)...

### So what is the basis of Ta'anit Esther?

Avudarham then proceeds to posit:

But rather this fast is to commemorate:

Esther 9:1-2

**1** And on the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month of Adar, on the 13<sup>th</sup> day in it, wherever the decree of the king and his law reached and was carried out, on the day that the enemies of the Jews designed to dominate them, and it was just the opposite, with the Jewish dominating their enemies. **2** The Jews assembled in their cities in all of the provinces of King Achashveirosh, to extend their hands against all those who wished to do them evil, and no one stood to oppose them, because fear of them fell upon all of the nations.

The Jews gathered together on the 13<sup>th</sup>, and there was a general gathering of the people. And so is explained in the Talmud Yerushalmi:

And in the morning there was an assemblage, and they gathered to fast.

And so explained R. Chananel, and for this reason, there is only a single day of fasting.

Orchot Chaim (Chelek Alef, Hilchot Ta'anit U'Purim) adds:

(Ta'anit Esther is intended) so that each person recall that the Creator, may He Be Blessed, Sees and Hears every individual at the time of his trouble when he fasts for His Sake, and he repents and returns to Him will all of his heart, as He Did for our ancestors during those days at this time...

Finally, HeMeiri (Magen Avot #23) refers to Ta'anit Esther oxymoronically as a "fast of joy."

### **An insight into the basic difference between Ta'anit Esther and the other fasts associated with the destruction of the Temples, i.e., Tzom Gedalya, Asara BeTevet, Shiva Asar B'Tamuz, and Tisha B'Av.**

Given that we continue to experience a sense of regret and loss regarding the various stages of the Batei Mikdash's ruin, they can hardly be referred to as "fasts of joy." While the Talmud states that someone who mourns the destruction of the Temple will merit seeing it rebuilt, nevertheless, for the time being, we are in a state of exile and Churban. The same is not true, however, with regard to Purim. Haman's plotting against the Jews constituted a time when the entire community was in danger. They fasted and

prayed for their salvation, and their supplications were answered with glorious salvation. The moments when it is clear that our prayers have been heard and God Intervenes, do not occur nearly frequently enough for us to feel secure and reassured. Just as there is a Mitzva during the course of the Pesach Seder to relive the experience of being redeemed from slavery, a similar impetus would appear to inform Purim, not only when we celebrate on Purim itself, but also when we urgently pray, imagining what those people in Persia felt like so long ago, knowing that their collective fates rested in God's Hands. Of course, we know how things turned out. Perhaps the imaginary component on Ta'anit Esther is to project ourselves into the Jews' shoes "before the fact" and offer supplications and repent wholeheartedly and sincerely.